

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John B. Cruz III

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Cruz, John B., 1943-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with John B. Cruz III,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 11, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:56:49).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Construction chief executive John B. Cruz III (1943 - ) co-founded the John B. Cruz Construction Company, and was an advocate for minority contractors in the United States. Cruz was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 11, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_132
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Cruz Construction Company president John Bert Cruz, III, was born on May 7, 1943, in Wareham, Massachusetts. Cruz's parents, John B. Cruz, Jr., and Madeline Martin Cruz, were the children of first generation emigrants from the Cape Verde Islands, off the Northwest coast of Africa. Descended from whale harpooners, Cruz's grandfather John B. Cruz, Sr., was a prohibition era business associate of Joseph P. Kennedy. Living with his mother until he was twelve, Cruz attended school in Wareham, Massachusetts, Cleveland, Ohio and Buffalo, New York. Cruz worked alongside his father as a carpenter in Boston in 1956. Completing his studies at Patrick T. Campbell Junior High School, Cruz graduated from Boston Technical High School in 1962; he then enrolled in Wentworth Institute where he studied business administration.

Joining his father's carpentry business, Cruz took care of the administrative work as superintendent and estimator of jobs. Significant growth led to the two going into the general contracting business with the formation of John B. Cruz Construction Company in 1969. In 1970, Cruz was bonded and accepted his first general contracting job. Mentored by Dennis Blackett, Cruz completed Taurus Apartments, an affordable housing project in 1973. Attending the Minority Developers Executive Training Program of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cruz gained the acumen necessary to build over 1,500 units of housing and to specialize in build-to-suit projects. By 1983, Cruz was building between 300 and 400 units annually, managing a workforce of over 2,000, and managing apartments. The John B. Cruz Construction Company provided general contracting services for various Boston area projects including The Fortress, Council Towers, Massachusetts Biotechnology Research Institute Laboratory Research Institute, Boston Police Department Headquarters, Reggie Lewis Track and Athletic Center, Prang House, and Prang Estates. Cruz handled jobs as large as \$17 million as a general contractor and \$150 million working with other companies; in 1989, he developed a \$36 million, 463 unit project.

As an active member of the Contractors Association of Boston and the National Association of Minority Contractors, Cruz joined with Smoot, Moody, McKissack and other black firms to fight for legislation to ensure

parity for minority contractors. Cruz committed to helping Cape Verdean and other minority contractors to develop, and to staying and working in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Cruz also established the John B. Cruz Bridgewater State University Scholarship in his father's name.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with John B. Cruz III was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 11, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Construction chief executive John B. Cruz III (1943 - ) co-founded the John B. Cruz Construction Company, and was an advocate for minority contractors in the United States.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Cruz, John B., 1943-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Cruz, John B., 1943- --Interviews

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African American businesspeople--Interviews

Contractors--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Construction Chief Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with John B. Cruz III, April 11, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with John B. Cruz III, Section A2007\_132\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:58 ?

John B. Cruz III was born on May 7, 1943 in Wareham, Massachusetts to Madeline Martin Allen and John B. Cruz, Jr. In the early 1900s, his maternal family emigrated from Cape Verde to New Bedford, Massachusetts, where his maternal great uncle worked as a harpooner and fisherman. Cruz's maternal grandparents, Mary Andrews Martin and Casimere Martin, settled in Freetown, Massachusetts, where Cruz's mother was born in 1919. His paternal grandparents, Caroline Cruz and John B. Cruz, Sr., were also of Cape Verdean descent. His paternal grandfather owned a grocery business, and worked for Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr. as a bootlegger during Prohibition. Cruz's mother left school at an early age, and began working as a waitress; while his father worked as a shipbuilder and carpenter at Massachusetts' Otis Air Force Base. There, he faced constant discrimination, so he left to found the John B. Cruz Construction Company in 1947.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Contractors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with John B. Cruz III, Section A2007\_132\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

John B. Cruz III's father, John B. Cruz, Jr., served in the U.S. Army during World War II, and then worked as a carpenter in the black community of Boston, Massachusetts. He founded the John B. Cruz Construction Company in 1947, and secured storefront and home renovation jobs, later taking on larger projects with homebuilders and apartment developers. After Cruz's parents divorced, he moved with his mother, Madeline Martin Allen, to Cleveland, Ohio; while his sister, Faith Cruz Cogan, remained with his father. When Cruz's mother remarried, they moved to Buffalo, New York, where Cruz attended Catholic schools and became an altar boy. Cruz was skeptical of some of the Catholic beliefs and doctrines. At twelve years old, Cruz was sent to live with his father in Boston. He also remember visiting his maternal grandfather, Casimere Martin, who raised grapes and cranberries on his farm, and sang Cape Verdean songs.

Video Oral History Interview with John B. Cruz III, Section A2007\_132\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

John B. Cruz III was raised by his mother, Madeline Martin Allen, and stepfather in Buffalo, New York, an industrial mill town where he recalls the smell of beer from the Iroquois Brewing Company. Cruz struggled while living away from his relatives in Massachusetts, and eventually returned to live with his father, John B. Cruz, Jr. in Boston. There, Cruz attended Patrick T. Campbell Junior High School, and then Boston Technical High School, where he excelled in math and history. At twelve years old, Cruz began working for his father at the John B. Cruz Construction Company on the weekends and during the summer. Upon graduating from Boston Technical High School, he considered becoming a writer, but decided to pursue a more stable career in construction. Cruz talks about racial identity and discrimination in the Cape Verdean community, including among his relatives, some of whom passed as white and identified as Portuguese.

Video Oral History Interview with John B. Cruz III, Section A2007\_132\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:48 ?

John B. Cruz III began working for his father, John B. Cruz, Jr., at thirteen years old. He initially wanted to leave the John B. Cruz Construction Company upon graduating from high school, but was persuaded by his guidance counselor to pursue the family business as a career. During this time, Cruz admired the work of the Perini Corporation, which built the Prudential Center in Boston,

Massachusetts. After graduating from Boston's Wentworth Institute, Cruz began working full time for his father, and developed plans to expand the company. In 1972, the John B. Cruz Construction Company secured its first general contracting project with a black developer, Dennis Blackett. Rejected for a business loan, Cruz's father mortgaged some of his properties to help them secure a line of credit, and began developing the Taurus Apartments, followed by the Taurus at Fountain Hill and the Sarah Baker Manor. In 1982, Cruz founded the Cruz Management Company, Inc., a property management firm.

Video Oral History Interview with John B. Cruz III, Section A2007\_132\_001\_005, TRT: 0:31:11 ?

John B. Cruz III's company, the John B. Cruz Construction Company, worked on the expansion of the Southeast Expressway in Boston, Massachusetts during the early 1970s. In addition, he built affordable housing developments like the Taurus Apartments, and planned to develop five thousand units in total. During his career in construction, Cruz encountered difficulties, including clients who he sued for outstanding payments. He belonged to the Contractors Association of Boston, which was founded in 1965 to encourage fair business practices, and create better opportunities for minority construction companies. He was also a member of the National Association of Minority Contractors, and mentored individuals interested in entering the construction field. Cruz had one daughter named Donna while in high school; and later had two children, Justin Cruz and Ariane Cruz, with his wife, Barbara Cruz. He reflects upon his concerns for the African American community, as well as his legacy and career.

Video Oral History Interview with John B. Cruz III, Section A2007\_132\_001\_006, TRT: 0:24:40 ?

John B. Cruz III served as the president of the National Association of Minority Contractors for two years, and was also the president of the Contractors Association of Boston. He was joined by his son, Justin Cruz, at the John B. Cruz Construction Company. Cruz describes how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.